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ABSTRACT

Attitudes toward marriage among unmarried women are of interest because they may reflect the impact of changing sex roles. To survey two aspects of attitudes toward marriage, i.e., evaluations and behavioral intentions, 214 unmarried college women completed a questionnaire. Results showed that, in general, attitudes toward marriage were favorable. Although 89% of the women expected to marry, they generally intended to delay marriage until about age 26. Evaluations predicted behavior intentions significantly as a whole for all groups except for those women from homes where the parents were separated. Those women whose parents' marriage was unhappy showed lower "expect to marry" scores. The findings suggest that attitudes toward marriage of participants from intact parental marriages seem to be integrated, whereas those from broken homes do not. (Author/JAC)

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ATTITUDES TOWARD MARRIAGE AMONG UNMARRIED FEMALE UNDERGRADUATES: EVALUATIONS VS BEHAVIOR INTENTIONS[1]

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Attitudes toward Marriage among Unmarried Female Undergraduates:

Evaluations vs Behavior Intentions

Attitudes toward marriage among unmarried college women are of interest to social psychologists because such attitudes may be related to changing sex roles in our present-day culture. One change which would appear to have strong effects upon the judgments, expectations, and intentions of young women is that women today devote a smaller part of their lives to raising children than was the case in earlier times (since families are smaller and lives are longer) (see Glick, 1977; Hoffman, 1977). Thus, more time is left for other pursuits. A second change is that working outside the home is increasingly prevalent among women today, even those with children. A third change is a striking increase in divorce rates (see Norton & Glick, 1976). If one out of three marriages is to fail, and with alimony for ex-wives less common, a young woman cannot count on marriage for a lifetime economic security. In addition, the women's liberation movement, with its emphasis on educational and vocational achievements for women, seems to add a thrust away from traditional sex roles (chiefly organized around marriage and children), and toward more extensive careers for young women, especially those who are well-educated.

Astin's large-scale surveys of nationwide samples of college freshmen (Astin, King, & Richardson, 1979) show some evidence of these changes. Between 1969 and 1979, for example, percentages of women endorsing wanting to be "an authority in my field" increased from 54.3 to 70.5 percent, and, in 1979, were only 4.8 percent lower than the percentage for men. The item "obtain recognition from peers" showed similar changes. Women endorsing wanting to "raise a family" declined in these years from 77.8 to 64.8 percent, which equals the percentage for men.

Other evidence supporting this trend includes a later average age for first marriages for women (see Cherlin, 1980), and the increasing prevalence of unmarried couples living together (see Glick & Spanier, 1980).

Altogether, then, cultural changes related to sex roles would seem to produce different lifetime expectancies for young women, and these changed expectancies seem likely to affect attitudes toward marriage. Since changes in sex roles are likely to be gradual and continuous, especially in their effects upon attitudes, it would seem important that research be directed towards such attitudes, in an attempt to reach a better understanding of these phenomena as they occur.

The present study is one such effort, and has been directed at two aspects of attitudes toward marriage: evaluations and behavioral intentions. Whether one adheres to a traditional multi-dimensional approach to attitudes, in which evaluations and behavior intentions are considered to be different aspects of a particular attitude (see Rokeach, 1968), or follows the more recent theories of Fishbein (1967) which limit the term attitude to a single evaluative dimension and consider behavior intentions as separate (but important) phenomena, it seems fruitful to study the relations between behavior intentions and evaluations.

Rokeach (1968), for example, suggests that one characteristic of attitudes is the degree to which the various aspects of a single attitude are integrated with each other (as opposed to being compartmentalized). Since it has been shown relatively often that attitudes may not agree with behavior (see Wicker, 1971) (nor presumably with behavior intentions, if people behave as they intend), it is clear that one cannot assume such an integration. Indeed, a number of experiments demonstrating cognitive dissonance (see Aronson, 1969,

for example) show that people can be induced in experiments to behave differently from their evaluations. Examples of such dissonance can also be found in everyday situations (e.g., the smoker who believes smoking will have negative consequences for his/her health). However, less conflict and distress would seem to ensue for a person whose behavior, behavior intentions and evaluations were consonant. Such a person would also be likely to be considered by others to be trustworthy and sincere, since actions and verbal sentiments would agree.

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) suggest that behavior intentions, when specific enough, are closely related to behavior, and are determined entirely by two components, one attitudinal (that is, perceptions of consequences and value of consequences), and the other normative (social norms, as perceived by the person, and motivation to conform). In their formulation, thus, if a zero relation obtains between the attitudinal component (evaluations) and behavior intentions, then the intentions would be a function of the normative component alone. (This was found in a study reported by Ajzen and Fishbein, 1973, for males in relation to premarital sex). Such a situation would seem to depict an extreme kind of dependence on social norms (with the person either conforming or reacting against the norms), with no internal convictions, perhaps analagous to Riesman's (1950) "outer-directed" person.

An opposite case would obtain for a person in the Fishbein and Ajzen formulation whose behavior intentions are independent of social norms. Here, behavior intentions would be determined solely by the attitudinal component. (This condition was approximated for females in relation to premarital sex in the Ajzen and Fishbein, 1973, study). Such a person would seem to be relatively free of social constraints, perhaps similar to Riesman's (1950) "inner-directed" person.

The present study has not attempted to measure Fishbein and Ajzen's normative component in relation to marriage, but has focused upon behavior intentions and evaluations. It was assumed that positive relations between these two variables would represent the attitude integration described by Rokeach (1968) and give some indication of the strength of the evaluation-behavior intention part of the Fishbein and Ajzen formulation (from which the strength of the normative-behavior intention could be estimated).

One factor which might affect the degree to which evaluations and behavior intentions toward marriage might agree among young women is their experience with their parents' marriages. Thus, negative experiences might produce less positive evaluations and behavior intentions, but might also lead to greater conflicts between them, particularly when, social norms, as they do, strongly favor marriage.

This study, then, is focused on behavior intentions toward and evaluations of marriage among a population of undergraduate unmarried women, with each of these constructs measured in two ways. The study was designed to assess the degree to which two kinds of evaluation (separately and together) would predict each kind of behavior intention. Since the state and happiness of parents' marriages and evaluations of the person's own career seemed important in relation to attitudes toward marriage, these factors were also included.

Method

Participants

Participants were 214 unmarried female undergraduates whose ages ranged from 17 to 23 (mean age = 19.16). 95% (204) of the participants had dated at least one member of the opposite sex during the last year; 30% (64) reported themselves very serious about this dating; 35% (75) moderately serious; 2% (5) reported themselves engaged to be married.

Each participant was approached individually by a member of a Courtship and Marriage course and asked to complete a questionnaire. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured, and participants were given an opportunity to receive a summary of the results of the study.

Questionnaire

Two measures of behavior intentions were (1) the question, "Do you at some time in your life expect to marry someone of the opposite sex?" There were five response categories, from "definitely yes" to "definitely no." It was assumed that positive expectations would indicate stronger intentions. (2) The question, "If so, at what age do you expect to marry?" The score here was the number of years in the future. It was assumed that fewer years before marriage indicated stronger intentions.

Two measures involving evaluations of marriage were (1) a rating of "My Marriage" on six adjective pairs from the evaluative dimension of the semantic differential (valuable-worthless, wise-foolish, successful-unsuccessful, interesting-boring, honest-dishonest, good-bad), (2) the completion of the sentence stem, "Marriage is ....". Responses were rated on a positive-negative dimension, with a 5-point scale. Two raters rated

each response independently, and then resolved their differences on those responses on which they had originally disagreed. Inter-rater reliability was .92 for a sample of 50 responses.

Participants were also asked if their parents were living together or apart, and, if apart, whether due to separation, death, or divorce. Each also rated the happiness of her parents' marriage, making use of a six-point scale, ranging from "very happy" to "very unhappy." Participants rated "My Career" on the semantic differential described above, and indicated their age. They also stated the number of persons dated in the last year, rated the seriousness of their dating, and reported whether or not they were engaged.

Results

Attitudes toward marriage

Means and standard deviations for the measures of evaluations and behavior intentions regarding marriage and that related to careers are shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

In general, attitudes toward marriage were favorable. For the "expect to marry" question, most participants (89%) selected either the "definitely yes" or "probably yes" response categories. The mean for this item was 4.3. Likewise, the mean favorability rating for the "Marriage is...." item was 4 on a 5-point scale, with 5 indicating a very positive view. The mean evaluations of "My Marriage" on the semantic differential are similarly positive (about 39 points out of 42). However, marriage for these 19-year-olds is to be postponed for over six years, when the participants will be about 26 years old.

Evaluations of "My Career" on the semantic differential were on the average higher than those for "My Marriage," but this difference was not significant ($t = 1.56$, $p = .20$). Ratings of "My Marriage" and "My Career" on the semantic differential correlated positively and significantly ($r = +.44$), which may perhaps be attributed to method variance. Ratings of "My Career" did not correlate significantly with any of the other three measures of attitudes toward marriage.

Behavior intentions vs evaluations

For the sample as a whole, correlations between the four attitudinal measures may be seen in Table 2. Although not high, five of the six coefficients are significantly higher than zero ($p = .01$), indicating a certain

Insert Table 2 about here

amount of convergence among the measures. Multiple R's were computed in order to determine how well the two evaluations (semantic differential and "Marriage is....") predicted each of the two behavior intentions (expect to marry and years in future). For "expect to marry," $R = .39$ ($F = 12.56$, $df = 3/211$, $p = .001$); for "years in future," $R = .36$ ($F = 10.42$, $df = 3/211$, $p = .001$).

Effects of parents' marriage

In order to analyze the effects of parents' marriages, 10 participants whose parents were separated by death were dropped from the sample, and the remaining 204 were divided into three groups. The first of these ($N = 135$), designated "Happy," were from intact homes and rated their parents' marriages as either "very happy or as "moderately happy." The second group ($N = 33$),

designated "Unhappy," were from intact homes and rated their parents' marriages as "mildly happy" or one of the three possible degrees of "unhappy." The third group (N = 36), labelled "Broken" came from broken marriages--their parents were separated and/or divorced. This group rated the happiness of their parents' marriages somewhat lower than did the "Unhappy" group ($t = 1.72$, $p = .10$). Mean scores for age, the four measures related to marriage, and evaluations of "My Career" for the three groups are shown in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

Simple analyses of variance were carried out for these six scores, but only one showed a significant effect. For the "expect to marry" score, group had a significant effect upon score ($F = 6.25$, $df = 2/201$, $p = .01$), with the "Unhappy" group mean score significantly lower than those of both the "Happy" and the "Broken" groups. As was true for the sample as a whole, mean evaluations of "My Career" were higher than mean evaluations of "My Marriage" for each of the three groups. This difference approached significance, however, only for the "Unhappy" group ($t = 1.86$, $p = .10$).

When correlations between the four attitudinal measures were examined separately for each of the three groups, all six of these were significantly higher than zero ($p = .01$) for the "Happy" group. Multiple R's were .45 ($F = 11.09$, $df = 3/131$, $p = .001$) for "expect to marry" and .52 ($F = 16.18$, $df = 3/131$, $p = .001$) for "years in future" for this group.

For the "Unhappy" group, four of the six correlations were significantly higher than zero ($p = .05$), and multiple R's were .54 ($F = 3.90$, $df = 3/29$, $p = .05$) and .55 ($F = 4.13$, $df = 3/29$, $p = .05$) for "expect to marry" and "years in future," respectively.

For the "Broken" group, on the other hand, only one of the six correlations was significantly higher than zero (-.40 between "expect to marry" and "years in future"), and multiple R's were .20 ($F = .524$, $df = 3/32$, ns) and .27 ($F = 1.12$, $df = 3/32$, ns) for "expect to marry" and "years in future", respectively.

Discussion

This study has employed a rating scale, a time estimate, the semantic differential and a projective technique to measure behavioral intentions toward and evaluations of marriage among a sample of unmarried undergraduate women.

Since practically all of the participants (95%) were dating members of the opposite sex, the majority (65%) with some seriousness, it may be assumed that most were involved to some degree in the courtship process. Attitudes in general were positive toward marriage, although these 19-year-olds did not think they would marry for over six years. This delay of marriage until approximately age 26, on the average, agrees with Astin et al's (1979) finding that the majority (80.9%) of freshmen women in their survey were not planning to marry within five years. Thus, the college women in the present sample, as well as those in Astin's national sample of freshmen women, plan to delay marriage well beyond what has recently been the average age of first marriages of women in the U.S. (22.1 in 1979).

It should also be noted that careers are evaluated slightly higher (although not significantly so) than marriage among the present sample. It may be perhaps concluded, then, that for this group as a whole, careers and marriage are equally favored, with neither valued more than the other.

Among the sample as a whole, the two evaluations of marriage predicted each measure of behavior intention at moderate, but significant, levels. Thus, in general, attitudes show some integration, in Rokeach's terms, and the attitudinal component in the Fishbein and Ajzen model does account for a significant amount of the variance of behavioral intentions. The moderate level of these multiple R's, however, indicates, according to this model, that the normative component also plays a substantial role in behavioral intentions towards marriage.

These conclusions may also be applied to the "Happy" and "Unhappy" sub-samples, both of which stem from parents who have stayed together. For the "Unhappy" group expectations for marriage are significantly lower than for the "Happy" or "Broken" groups, and their evaluations of careers tend to be higher than those of marriage. The "Unhappy" group thus seems to be least motivated for marriage, perhaps as a result of their exposure to the relatively unhappy marriages of their parents.

For the "Broken" group, on the other hand, expectations of marriage were not significantly lower than those of the "Happy" group. The fact that their parents' marriages had failed would seem to have elicited from them a greater motivation to marry, perhaps as a compensation for broken homes experienced during childhood and/or adolescence.

For the "Broken" group, in addition, evaluations did not predict behavior intentions. Thus, in Rokeach's terms, the various components of their attitudes toward marriage were compartmentalized rather than being integrated. From the standpoint of the Fishbein and Ajzen model, the attitudinal component was not related to behavior intentions; thus, if one assumes reliability

and validity of measurement, and a sample of sufficient size, one can conclude that for this group behavior intentions toward marriage would be completely determined by the normative component (social norms and motivation to conform). Since behavior intentions for marriage are relatively high for this group, it can also be assumed that the normative component is relatively positive.

In conclusion, this study shows that despite the delay in marriage for young, educated women today, and the importance of careers, behavior intentions and evaluations of marriage ~~are~~ positive. For women stemming from either happy or unhappy intact parental marriages, evaluations and behavior intentions ~~are~~ consonant. Unhappy parental marriages seem to dampen intentions to marry and to produce higher evaluations of careers, relative to marriage. For the daughters of broken homes, on the other hand, intentions to marry ~~are~~ high, but evaluations and behavior intentions regarding marriage are dissonant. Such dissonance may imply a complete dependence of behavior intentions on social norms and motivation to conform, and/or a degree of conflict or compartmentalization of attitudes concerning marriage.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Behavior Intentions toward Marriage and Evaluations of Marriage and of Career for 214 Unmarried Female Undergraduates

Measure	Mean	Standard Deviation
Expect to marry[1]	4.3	.69
Years in future	6.6	2.81
Marriage is ...[2]	4.0	.94
Semantic differential[3] marriage	38.7	3.93
Semantic differential[3] career	39.2	3.47

1. Scale ranged from 5 (definitely yes) to 1 (definitely no).
2. Scale ranged from 5 (very positive) to 1 (very negative).
3. Possible scores on 6 7-point ratings ranged from 6 to 42, with a higher score indicating a more positive evaluation.

Table 2

Correlations among two Measures of Behavior Intentions toward and two Measures of Evaluation of Marriage among 214 Unmarried Female Undergraduates

	2 years	3 marriage is	4 semantic differential
1. Expect to marry	-.38*	.29*	.31*
2. Years in future		-.1[illegible]	-.35*
3. Marriage is ...			.19*

* p = .01

Table 3

Mean Age, Behavior Intentions toward Marriage, and Evaluations of Marriage and Career for Unmarried Female Undergraduates in Happy, Unhappy, and Broken Groups

Group	N	Age	Expect to Marry	Years in Future	Marriage is	Semantic Differential Marriage	Semantic Differential Career
Happy	135	19.2	4.40	6.44	4.01	38.91	39.07
Unhappy	33	19.2	3.94	6.57	3.91	38.06	39.66
Broken	36	19.0	4.31	6.97	3.92	39.22	39.53